

S O C I E T Y

F O R

CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION.

THE design of this Society is to diffuse throughout the kingdom, as universally as possible, a knowledge of the great principles of Constitutional Freedom, particularly such as respect the election and duration of the representative body. With this view Constitutional Tracts, intended for the extension of this knowledge, and to communicate it to persons of all ranks, are printed and distributed **GRATIS**, at the expence of the Society. Essays, and Extracts from various authors, calculated to promote the same design, are also published under the direction of the Society, in several of the News-papers: and it is the wish of the Society to extend this knowledge throughout every part of the united kingdoms, and to convince men of all ranks, that it is their interest, as well as their duty, to support a free Constitution, and to maintain and assert those common rights, which are essential to the dignity, and to the happiness of human nature.

To procure short parliaments, and a more equal representation of the people, are the primary objects of the attention of this Society, and they wish to disseminate that knowledge

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among their Countrymen, which may lead them to a general sense of the importance of these objects, and which may induce them to contend for their rights, as men, and as citizens, with ardour and with firmness,

The communication of sound political knowledge to the people at large must be of great national advantage; as nothing but ignorance of their natural rights, or inattention to the consequence of those rights to their interest and happiness, can induce the majority of the inhabitants of any country to submit to any species of civil tyranny. Public Freedom is the source of national dignity, and of national felicity; and it is the duty of every friend to virtue and mankind to exert himself in the promotion of it.

By the laws of the Constitutional Society it is unlimited in its numbers. All questions in the Society are determined by ballot; and all ballots are taken by the President, or presiding Member.

Gentlemen desirous of becoming Members are to be admitted by ballot, and to subscribe from One to Five Guineas per Annum; and those who wish to contribute otherwise to the support of this Institution, will please to remit their contributions for this purpose to *Edward Bridgen, Esq. in Pater-noster Row, London*; signifying, that what they order is to be paid into the Hands of the *Treasurer of the Society for Constitutional Information*.

T R A C T S
PUBLISHED AND DISTRIBUTED GRATIS
BY
THE SOCIETY FOR
CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION.

*At a Meeting of the Society for CONSTITUTIONAL
INFORMATION held at Holyland's Coffee-house
in the Strand, on Friday, April 18th 1783.*

Dr. BROCKLESBY in the Chair.

Resolved,

THAT the following Extract from "A LETTER to
"his Grace the Archbishop of CANTERBURY, by
RICHARD Lord Bishop of LANDAFF," be published
in the News-papers.

"With respect to the influence of the crown, I have
considered it in the following manner :

In the embarrassing situations of private life, we all acknowledge the propriety and feel the utility, of consulting, not humble and pliant dependents, but sensible and independent friends: when our own understandings are distracted by doubts, heated by resentment, instigated by ambition, depressed by despair, or deranged and distempered by the violence of any affection, the advice of an honest, independent, and dispassionate friend is of the greatest use; it may often, at the moment of its being given, be very unpalatable, but it is always salutary, and we seldom fail to repent the not having taken it. It is the misfortune of men in elevated situations, that they seldom meet with friends who will speak plainly to them, or attempt to stop their career of folly or extravagance; the fear of offending cramps the disposition for advising;

many a great estate has been foolishly dissipated, many a fair character undone, by the timid forbearance, the interested acquiescence of expecting dependents; which might have been preserved intire and unfulfilled, by the firm remonstrance of an honest friend. This observation is certainly as applicable to the concerns of public as of private life; the advice of an independent parliament is as serviceable to the crown, as that of an independent friend is to an individual. We know by whom it was said, *where no counsel is, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety*; and we know too, that the wise king who said it, would have said no such thing, had he suspected that an external influence, rather than an internal conviction, would have rendered his multitude of counsellors all of the same mind. * * * * *

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For my own part, and I verily believe I am far from being singular in my notions, I take this opportunity of publicly declaring to your Grace, what I have a thousand times before declared to my friends in private, that I never entertained the most distant desire, of seeing either the democratical, or the aristocratical scale of the constitution, outweigh the monarchical; not one jot of the legal prerogative did I ever wish to see abolished; not one tittle of the King's influence in the state to be destroyed, except so far as it was extended over the deliberations of the hereditary counsellors of the crown, or the parliamentary representatives of the people. I own I have wished, and I own (with a heart as loyal as the loyalest) that I shall continue to wish, that an influence of this kind may be diminished; because I firmly believe, that its diminution will, eventually, tend to the conservation of the genuine constitution of our country; to the honour of his Majesty's government; to the stability of the Hanover succession; and to the promotion of the public good. Had the influence here spoken of been less predominant of late years, had the measures of the cabinet been canvassed by the wisdom, and tempered by the moderation of men exercising their free powers of deliberation for the common weal, the brightest jewel of his Majesty's crown had not now been tarnished; the strongest limb of the British empire had not now been rudely severed from its parent stock. I make not this remark with a view of criminating any set of ministers (for the best may be mistaken in their judgments, and errors which are past should be forgotten, buried in

in the zeal of all parties to rectify the mischiefs they have occasioned) but simply to shew, by a recent example, that the influence of the crown, when exerted by the *cabinet*, over the *public* counsellors of the King, is a circumstance so far from being to be wished by his true friends, that it is as dangerous to the real interests and honour of the crown itself, as it is odious to the people, and destructive of public liberty; it may contribute to keep a prime minister in his place contrary to the sense of the wisest and best part of the community; it may contribute to keep the King himself unacquainted with his peoples wishes, but it cannot do the King or the State any service. To maintain the contrary is to satirize his Majesty's government; it is to insinuate that his views and interests are to be disjoined from those of his people, that they cannot be effectuated by the uninfluenced concurrence of honest men. It is far beneath the character of a great and an upright Monarch, to be suspected of a desire to carry any plans of government into execution in opposition to the sentiments of a free and enlightened parliament; and the minister who should be base enough to advise him to adopt such an arbitrary system of government, or should supply the corrupted means of carrying it on, would deserve the execration of every man of integrity, and would, probably, sooner or later, meet with the deserved detestation of the prince himself. It is of such men as these, there is no impropriety I hope in borrowing truth from tragedy, since Chrysoctom is said to have slept with even an Aristophanes under his pillow; it is of such men as these the poet speaks;

*It is the curse of Kings, to be attended
By slaves that take their humours for warrant;
And who, to be endeared to a King,
Make no conscience to destroy his honour.*

In a word, if there be any one measure more likely than another to preserve pure and unblemished the honour of the crown; to secure its most valuable rights; to procure for it warm, bold, determined friends, who in the hour of danger would support it at the hazard of their lives against foreign or domestic insult; I verily believe it to be, the establishing, as much as possible, the independency of the several members of both houses of parliament.

T. YATES, Secretary.

*At a Meeting held at Holyland's Coffee-house in the Strand, on
Friday, May 30th 1783.*

Sir CECIL WRAY, Bart. (President) in the Chair.

Resolved,

THAT the following Letters, concerning a Reform in Parliament, be printed with the other tracts of this Society.

L E T T E R I.

“ The rage of war hath at length subsided, and Englishmen are left at leisure to contemplate on the humiliating conditions which their long inattention to their own affairs, and their blind acquiescence in the will of an ambitious ministry, and corrupt parliament, have at last reduced them to accept. Happy will it be for us, if, instead of sinking under our calamities, or venting ineffectual curses on the ministers or commanders whom we perhaps justly consider as the authors of our misfortunes, every considerate Englishman would turn his eyes, his wishes, his endeavours, to the attainment of the grand *desideratum*—a free and independent parliament—that no future ministry may be able, year after year, to lengthen out the horrid scene of civil desolation in contradiction to the wishes of a large majority of the people, nor again, in contempt of our remonstrances, hold out in their defence the cruel sanction of a pensioned and perfidious senate.

Objects of the first magnitude will soon present themselves for public discussion :—The disbanding our armies, the reform of our representation, the abolition of pensions and sinecure places, all these measures will again pass in review before our worthy parliament, will again be supported by the soundest reasoning and incontrovertible arguments, and again (it is easy to foresee) will sink under the weight of a dead and silent majority. For, if inconsistent with the private views of a minister and their own emoluments, what other issue can reasonably be expected to the most salutary proposal, if upwards of 200 members of the house of commons are known to be enlisted under the banner of corruption, regimented and paid, like Eexman Lanfquenets, to vote for or against their country, as their officers shall direct, and regarding nothing so
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little as the interest of the persons who sent them there to act for the public good, and with whose money, scandalous to relate, they are thus bribed to betray it !

All the independent members of parliament, all the writers of any eminence on the English constitution, a vast majority of the people at large, are unanimous in recommending this grand reformation. It is therefore hoped that the public, in all opposition which may arise to this salutary scheme, will rightly distinguish between that which is the consequence of real conviction uninfluenced by private advantage, and the mean and self-interested resolves of *certain corporate bodies*, who, eager to maintain their exclusive privileges of voting, their unjust monopolies of general and public rights, have dared to brand, as dangerous and seditious, the efforts of a people to correct notorious abuses, and to prevent in future the avowed venality of their own representatives.

There are some people who plead for corruption, and maintain that it is necessary for the ministry to be secure of a majority : “ a ministry are no longer a ministry than they can carry their point.” What ! right or wrong, is it necessary for them to carry their point ? Was this then the wisdom of our ancestors ? Is this our boasted constitution, the admiration and envy of surrounding nations ? What is this but to justify arbitrary government, to take away all necessity for the existence of a house of commons, to render it a machine without any will of its own, an useless and most expensive appendage to government ?

There is nothing clearer than that it is the general wish of the nation, that the salaries of public offices should be much retrenched ; that the greatest part, if not all, of the sinecure places should be abolished, and very considerable reductions made in the pension list. But what hope, what prospect, have we, that this will be effected by our present representatives, or that those men among whom the greatest part of the public spoils are divided, will be forward to enquire into public abuses, or to promote those plans of public reform, the first object of which will be to strike off their pension, and reduce them to the beggary they merit ?

What then remains to be done, but for every well-wisher to his country to join heart and hand to promote a reform so desirable ; and if Mr. Pitt’s bill for a more equal representa-

tion, soon to be presented, should be lost, as will probably be its fate, to unite with zeal in associations for that end. Let us not be alarmed at the thought of associations, which are strictly legal, and have many precedents to support them. There was an association in King John's time to procure Magna Charta; another for the defence of Queen Elizabeth; another for the support of the Protestant Religion, and the exclusion of the Duke of York; another in 1744, for the support of public credit; all of which proved highly beneficial to this country; and such, there is no doubt but, this also will prove, if there is public virtue enough left amongst us to put it in practice.

L E T T E R II.

"I received a most sensible pleasure in perusing the letter from a society of Wiltshire readers inserted in the Bath Chronicle. I entirely coincide with them in sentiment. Every measure ought to be adopted to obtain a radical cure for our great national calamity; their attention and abilities, I hope, will continue to be exerted to accomplish this desired end, "this consummation so devoutly to be wished." Every breast glowing with the bright flame of freedom should step forth, and endeavour to animate and arouse his too indifferent countrymen; fix their attention to that grand point, without which their political happiness and boasted privileges, as a *free people*, are extinct,—A Parliamentary Reform! the want of which, it may be clearly deduced, has been the *cause* of our last seven years misfortunes, and without which our darling liberty will no longer dwell among us; but, bidding adieu to the European clime, and this her favoured last retreat, wing her flight to a more propitious shore across the Atlantic.

With the diffidence of inadequate ability, I submit my sentiments:—

It is necessary to define the description of men to whom this is more particularly addressed: *It is to every man conscious that he ought to be represented, yet feels he is not.* If there are half a million of men in the kingdom fully answering this description, who contribute, by paying every tax, to the support of government, and personally or by proxy to its defence; if they feel they have no assent to give in acts of national legislature, by which themselves are bound, while a tenth part
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of their numbers more than half fill the house of commons, it is no unreasonable requisition to demand, that *their voice* should also be heard in the national assembly.

A summary revision of the original institution of parliament will best elucidate, and point out the defects in the present state of representation.

Parliament is but an abridgment of the whole body of the people (who, too multitudinous an assembly in the aggregate to debate themselves with precision, do it by attorney) from whom originates every principle of power in the constitution, delegated, but never alienated; in whom is the inherent right individually to assent (by their representatives) to laws framed for the general good; but in whom is equally the indefeasible right to reject, and abrogate, any nefarious act that may have been surreptitiously foisted upon them:—Such was the septennial bill, solely an act of the attorney, without the consent of the principal.

The King formerly, when he had occasion to consult his people, convened them by the titles of knights, citizens, and burghesses; these in the origin of parliament were elected for the temporary occasion; when that ceased, they were dissolved of course, and a repetition of the assembly produced a re-election. The knights representing counties were most respectable, and returned by what was antiently called the yeomanry of England: a denomination of men, the hardy features of whose character were, inflexibility to the domestic tyrant, and stubborn, invincible courage to the foreign foe; alike the internal support, and external defence of their country. 'Twas they (like Cincinnatus), warriors from the plough, fought the fields of Cressly and Agincourt; 'twas they, headed by the barons, their friends and coadjutors (not their masters) compelled from tyranny that charter, and those privileges, their degenerate descendants enjoy, and with a spirit they boast of without daring to emulate. Hospitality then dwelt in the habitation of the English baron; the servile contaminating air of a court had not found its way into his antiquated mansion, nor tinged the manners of his friendly adherents: conscious independence gave them a firmness of step on their native patrimony, their self-cultivated acres; and an erectness of mien that dared look every thing in the face.

To this class of our virtuous ancestors, we owe the establishment of our invaluable constitution. Diminished confessedly

lessly as is this estimable race of men from various deducible causes, yet to their descendants, the present freeholders, are we still indebted, in the present independent country members, for all that we retain of it; they are the principal bulwark between prince and people, the sheet-anchor by which holds the only *limited monarchy* in Europe.

The citizens were returned by the metropolis and capitals of counties; and the burgesses by smaller towns at that time of consequence, and remarkable for population.

These were all, in the original institution, the real representatives of the people, appointed by them to the *task* of duty, and not with sinister fallaciousness solicited by the candidate as an honour. Independent men the law of parliament presupposed them, from the qualification required: always resident, they possessed local knowledge, native affection; ever active and attentive to the constituent interest; unbiassed, incorrupt, their only object was the good of their country, which they saw through its truest medium; their debates were short (truth is seldom an abstruse point); no tongue was then interested to make "the worse appear the better reason;" their resolves were unanimous, and always decisive.

I will not say the constitution has deviated from its primitive principle, but it is certain the flow stream of time has removed us from the ground on which representation first stood. Agriculture was formerly almost the sole source of riches in this country, but long since the original formation of our constitution, the discovery of new worlds, a wonderfully extended commerce, increased manufactures, but above all the immense funded national debt, have created a property then unthought of; which it will hardly be denied is not now adequately represented in the state. The freeholders are, and ever must be, the most respectable body of electors in the kingdom; but their due weight in the political scale is subverted by the venal boroughs; the extermination of which ought to be the ardent wish of every true lover of his country.

In support of the landed property, and as an auxiliary to its independent interest, be it observed, that the citizens representing capitals of counties, are (with a very few exceptions) returned by a corporate body of from ten to fifty, to the exclusion perhaps of two or three thousand fellow citizens. Householders, amenable to every tax, equally adequate from educa-

education and from property, have a right to judge of the fitness or unfitness of their representatives; men bred to professions; men living upon acquired fortunes, but vested in securities deemed by them more eligible than landed property; manufacturers, and artizans of various denominations, with most populous appendages. Added to these, the immense number of men and families employed in the long detail of internal commerce; amongst whom frequently are many freeholders of distant counties, accidentally transplanted, from whose *undistinguished virtue* it is not to be expected they should travel a hundred miles at *individual expence* to give conscientious suffrage: No! where permanently and substantially fixed, there they ought to have a local consequence. These form the bulk of inhabitants in cities and large towns, employing in trade probably from 500 l. to 5000 l. who, while they are sedulously applying to acquire fortunes for their families, are, in conjunction with the landed property, the great support of the state. For were every unrepresented man of the above description to refuse paying the taxes, it would make a horrid chasm in the public finances. Who pay the taxes? Not the great only, their numbers are inefficient; not the cottager, inability is a preclusion: They fall then on the middling class, whose numbers and property effectually sinew the hands of government. For let taxation, Proteus-like, assume what shape he will, assessments of land, duties on foreign imports, or internal excise, the burthen ultimately falls on the consumer.—To this description of men principally this letter is addressed, *who being conscious that they ought to be represented, yet feel they are not.*

The burgesses remain to be mentioned. Burgage tenures have often been emphatically called the rotten part of our constitution; indeed the data is never denied: subversive not only of what they were originally intended to support, but in the *mode of election* subversive also in the most flagitious degree of morality. The shocking detail is not now designed, but only to consider the numbers which form the body of reputed electors. Let any one cast his eye on the map of England, from the North Foreland in Kent, to the Land's End in Cornwall, and observe the number of boroughs that send members to parliament; from the Cinque Ports; from places that exist no longer but in name; from others so insignificant and inconsiderable, that the united consequence of forty of them does not amount to half of that of three (at

present unrepresented) manufacturing towns; and yet, even here, in many places not a fourth, in others not a twentieth part of the inhabitants are permitted to vote; and in some, incredible to relate! hardly one, but honorary burgessees return the members, that never saw the place in their lives before they came there to give their vote. Yet has corruption dared to assert it sacrilege to touch this venerable fabric!

The single intent of this letter is to place in one point of view, the numbers that send members to parliament, and the numbers that do not. Setting aside the counties and great independent towns, and considering only the corporate bodies, and garbled boroughs, where the voters are contracted, nothing near so many as fifty thousand suffrages return half the English members of the house of commons; while there are more than five hundred thousand fellow-citizens, people of property, equally eligible, that have not a voice to return one.

It would be an abuse of argument, to adduce one from the premises: the only wonder is, how the usurpation has continued so long. The remedy is in the power of the people; they have only to demand with firmness, what must be granted, not as a matter of courtesy, but right. There is no power in the constitution to deprive an Englishman of his unforfeited franchise, nor to withhold it, legally demanded. The epithet of virtual representation has done mischief enough in the case of the Colonies; it is nonsense and insolence to use it. Put the case strongly:—Should the first estate in the constitution destroy the privileges of the present electors, and, instead of appealing to their approbation, appoint representatives for counties as he does sheriffs (the case is only more new, not more unjust) would they deem themselves represented, and submit to the innovation? No; they would find a remedy in resistance."

L E T T E R III.

" In my last I made an humble attempt to demonstrate the gross inequality, and consequent injustice, in the present state of *parliamentary representation*; the point is most amply accomplished by the Duke of Richmond, who, in his letter to the high sheriff of the county of Sussex, calculates, that " All the electors in Great Britain do not amount to one sixth part of the whole people, and a still greater inequality subsists in the elections made by that sixth part; for one seventh part of

of them elect a majority, so that one forty-seventh part of the nation dispose of the property of the whole, and have their lives and liberties at command. And this forty-second part, far from consisting of the most opulent part of the kingdom, is composed of the small boroughs, most of which are become either the private property of individuals, or are notoriously sold to the best bidder; so that the counties and great cities are, in fact, as well as the great mass of the people, swallowed up in this system of corruption."

Another calculation instances, in a striking point of view, where *twelve electors* (the whole number of six boroughs) return *twelve members*;—as many as six opulent counties, and three times as many as the city of London.

A multitude of other defects, of shameful notoriety, might be enumerated, but too voluminous for newspaper insertion.

If these facts are established (and the proofs are too incontrovertible) if it be admitted that *the house of commons ought to be a real representation of the people*, will the most interested abettors of corruption have the effrontery to assert, that the *present* is so? and dare to brand as sacrilegious, that hand that should attempt to support this mouldering ruin, this venerable, but decayed, fabric?

Corruption, the chief engine of despotism (interested to support itself) is ever on the watch to curtail the natural and equal right of mankind. Corruption loves the few, loves concealment, always has an arcana, which too many vulgar eyes would profane: hence the cherished maxim, that the electors cannot be too circumscribed; though now only a forty-second part of the people return a majority, *they* sometimes give too much trouble; if only one in a thousand voted, it would be full enough; virtual representation (that convenient epithet) would comprehend them all; and as for any controul the represented may idly pretend to have over the representor, it is the highest piece of impertinence to think of it; what a man has bought, that he has surely a right to sell.

The arguments used by the abettors of this system are equally cogent with the goodness of their cause: the elegant, ready cut and dry phrase yclep'd "botching the constitution," is ever in their mouths; but this objection, it is hoped, will be totally obviated by not a *partial*, but a reform on the *broadest basis*, where every man, who with his person and property supports and defends the state, shall be restored to his inherent right, to his primeval privilege. It comes home

to every man's conviction, nay to his confession, that it *ought to be so*; and the only objection to the attempt is, the despair of ever attaining so great, so desirable an end.

It is alledged, that annual or frequent elections would be productive of much drunkenness and riot: this at first sight appears plausible, arguing from present woeful experience; but a moment's consideration will discover, that corruption herself will invalidate that plea; for take away consequence, patronage, emoluments, from a seat in parliament, and the candidate will not pay the price of making an elector drunk for his suffrage. (Who with earnestness, were it elective, would solicit the honour of being sheriff? Yet is the office of great trust, highly, and—what men covet—locally honourable.) *Seventy* annual elections (if the desired reform takes place) will not *then* produce so much disorder as a single septennial one *now*; the cause removed, the effect will cease*.

A most insolent proposition is advanced, that individuals possessing boroughs will be injured in their property. Heavens! are we propertied? Are Englishmen to be disposed of like the vassals of a Polish district? the appropriated cattle of the soil? The spirit of a Briton spurns indignant at the idea! Whence originated this right? How grew it? Is it not an act of attorney, pleading the unjust demand of his principal? There certainly was no original property in boroughs, nor does the long dormant claim of the rightful owner argue any prescriptive right in the possessor, or in the smallest degree invalidate his indefeasible right to reassume.

Innovations in the constitution are said to be dangerous, especially as it is not known to what extent they may go: this is the most general, and would be the most forcible, argument, if founded in fact. We have heard this language held by men whose veracity we subscribe to, and whose characters we revere; but if they, from a partial bias, see this object through a false medium, let not a respect for their opinions mislead, or cause us to neglect the duty we owe ourselves. It is not in states, or great bodies of men, where they form a common opinion, and act in a corporate capacity, that the same spring and principles are to be found as actuate individuals.—Friendship and generosity, the fine feelings of the

* If pure is the spring from the fountain,
As purely the river will flow;
If muddy the stream from the mountain,
It poisons the valley below.

heart, may influence the latter to prefer the good of a beloved object to itself ; but where the collective body speaks, interest alone governs : therefore the opinions of men of this description, however in other respects unexceptionable, are to be received with a latitude, *because the interest warps the judgment*. Were I a member of a corporate body, I should most certainly think no person more competent to decision, than myself and brethren, and deem it injurious to have my privileges lessened ; not in the smallest degree glancing an eye to the excluding monopoly that destroys the equal rights of my fellow-citizens. It is the interest of corrupting ministers, corrupting boroughs, and corporate bodies with exclusive privileges, to support the present system ; but it is the interest of the community at large to emancipate themselves ; therefore it is no innovation in the constitution for the people to desire equal representation ; it is reverting to its original principles ; from which, led by the hand of corruption, it has deviated ; nor can there be any danger in the endeavours to restore it, because it can go no farther than its proper level, universal and co-equal right.

Two centuries ago, many of the (present) obnoxious boroughs possessed local consequence, which the hand of time has now transferred to other places. Is it innovation in the constitution to require that representation should follow population and property ? And is it not contradictory to common sense to insist it shall be fixed to an obsolete desert ? Suppose a town, consisting of a thousand houses, should be so far burned down, and destroyed, as to leave only one house standing, and the inhabitants should prefer a scite to rebuild their town a mile removed from the original spot ; would it not be in the highest degree absurd and unjust, if the right of representation should be judged to remain with the single house, and not remove with the inhabitants ?

Super-added to these reasons for a parliamentary reform, be the grand one adduced. Corruption had not then contrived to sow the seeds of a separate interest between constituent and representative ; then kingly prerogative was the common enemy, of which the people were always jealous, and to oppose which their representatives, with *undivided opinion*, were always united in a firm phalanx : then the delegated suffrages of the people formed the third, distinct, uncorrupted, estate of the kingdom ; and as the constitution then stood, it was rightly judged, the powers lodged in their hands could not
be

be too extensive ; but the complexion of the times is changed. We have now more to apprehend from the domestic assassin, sly insidious privilege, than even from the hostile attacks of the open foe prerogative. It was a known apophthegm of the great Lord Treasurer Burleigh, "*that England could never be ruined but by parliament.*" This saying, the result of profound wisdom, and surely dictated by a spirit of prophecy, is nearly accomplished in our times : and if the *reform* does not take place, Englishmen may bid adieu to their liberties, for the fraudulent miuing arts of corruption will most assuredly effectuate by sap, what tyranny could never carry by storm.

T. YATES, Sec.

At a Meeting held at Holyland's Coffee-house in the Strand, on Friday, July 4th 1783.

Dr. J E B B (Vice-President) in the Chair.

Resolved,

THAT the following Letter from Capel Lofft, Esq. to Mr. Yates be entered in the books of this Society, and published in the news-papers.

" S I R,

Troston Hall, 30 May 1783.

" I have received your enclosure, containing the Dialogue between the Scholar and the Peasant, with the resolves of the Society concerning it ; who, I think, have acted, as became them in publishing what has been done by them to promote the distribution of that constitutional and useful summary of the principles of government familiarly illustrated. When I first received it, convinced of the justness and utility of the sentiments, and struck with the clear and ingenious mode of conveying them, I sent it to the editor of one of our best county papers, desiring it might be inserted ; which it accordingly was. I have distributed a considerable number, and have found the doctrine and its illustration much and generally approved. If more of the second edition should be intrusted to my disposal, together with the other tracts mentioned in my former letter, I shall not fail to circulate them. The substance of the Dialogue, which I have scrutinized and repeatedly reconsidered, appears no more than an assertion of the right of the people to agree to laws by a free and equal choice of representatives, where they judge it impracticable to convene

vene personally for that purpose ; and the right of resisting, should government oppose force to justice. Points which, could they be made doubtful, the idea of a Society for Constitutional Information would be weak indeed. Since it could not (this being supposed) be proved, that the people had any rights of which to be informed, and it would be very evident, that what may not be defended is possessed in vain ; so that to be convinced of its existence and value would only be an aggravation of wretchedness. Once indeed there was a time of disgrace, in which a declaration was prescribed by act of parliament, subjecting all to the mercy of the crown, by requiring the subject of this immemorially free nation to declare, that it was not lawful, upon any pretence whatever, to take arms against the King * : and whereby the conscience was farther violated, by enjoining an abhorrence to be declared of the doctrine of contending for the constitutional rights of the kingdom, against (if necessity should require) the person wearing the crown ; but departing from those rights : which conduct, justified by reason, and exemplified in so many illustrious instances, is qualified by the title of ‘ that traiterous position of taking arms by his (the King’s) authority against his person, or against those that are commissioned by him.’ This declaration is deservedly repealed by the 1 W. & M. chap. 8. And in the year following, what was negatively established, by taking away the unjust obstacle of the declaration, was affirmatively pronounced by the bill of rights, in the clause, providing, that the subjects which are protestants may have arms for their defence, suitable to their condition, and as allowed by law. A right not only allowed, but a duty, of which the body of the people are reminded by several of our antient laws ; being the only public defence before standing armies were introduced, and our militia moulded into an establishment of too near resemblance to that engine of despotism. We are Englishmen ; and have not conferred on our Kings or Parliaments all our right and power, as the Roman Emperors pretended the degenerate sons of that great republic had transferred theirs to them : yet even there, a Trajan was not wanting, who recognized a right, which no forms, no concessions can abrogate, by annexing to the vows for the continuance of his health and empire the condition, ‘ if he governed well and to the good of the community ;’ and by delivering to the captain of the

Prætorian Band the sword, with this admonition, 'For, or against me, as I deserve.'

I am, S I R,

Your obedient servant,

CAPEL LOFFT,

To Mr. THOMAS YATES,
Secretary to the Constitutional Society.

Resolved,

THAT the following Letter from Capel Lofft, Esq. to Mr. Yates, containing an Extract from The Legislative Rights of the Commonalty vindicated, by Major Cartwright, be entered in the books of this Society, and published in the news-papers.

" S I R,

Troston Hall, June 23, 1783.

" The following Extract from 'The Legislative Rights of the Commonalty vindicated,' by Major Cartwright, I think is not among the extracts hitherto published by the Society. It appears seasonable, to the removal of a fallacious objection, the more dangerous because founded on the appearance of a zeal for the rights of freedom. And at the same time that it proves how much that zeal is mistaken in its object, it points to us the dreadful amputation which our elective rights are really condemned to suffer by those who would confine them within the narrow and partial limits to which they have been unconstitutionally and against first principles of right restricted.

After stating the well-known objection of Junius, against amputating those rotten parts of the constitution, the petty boroughs—that, granting the right, the limits which must direct the execution of it, cannot be satisfactorily or justly ascertained, this excellent assertor of our only constitutional security, free, equal, and universal suffrage annually exercised, replies, 'In answer to his query concerning which are the rotten parts proposed to be amputated, I would, with much deference, take leave to remark, that this allusion (as is too common with the language of allusion) does not furnish us with a correct idea of the nature of the case. The disease is not so much a partial gangrene as a general taint. The rottenness in the members is but a symptom of the corruption in the blood: purify this and that will disappear. Life may, indeed, be saved by amputation, when that cruel remedy becomes necessary: but amputation is itself a partial death; and at best it leaves us but the remains of a maimed
' and

‘ and mutilated body. For a bad habit of body then we must
 ‘ not have recourse to the knife, but to medicine and regimen.

‘ Now, I make no scruple to assert, that *just so much* of
 ‘ our mode of electing as operates to the exclusion of any in-
 ‘ dividual man from giving his vote, and *just so much* as we
 ‘ exceed the duration of one year in the length of our parlia-
 ‘ ments, is defective and unfair ; and therefore ought to be
 ‘ altered. The numbers who now elect with respect to those
 ‘ excluded (admitting the first to be 214,000, and the whole
 ‘ number intitled to be 1,500,000) are in proportion of one
 ‘ to seven : and the same proportion there is again between
 ‘ a septennial and an annual parliament. If therefore we ac-
 ‘ count the sum total of the liberty we enjoy to be equal to
 ‘ forty-nine, then by the inequality of representation it is
 ‘ brought down as low as *seven*, and by the imposition of a
 ‘ septennial parliament it is finally reduced to ONE. So that
 ‘ we may say, with precision, that the rottenness extends to
 ‘ forty-eight parts in forty-nine. In other words, your liber-
 ‘ ties, Britons, are gone [in this proportion] A free
 ‘ state is an island encircled by a sea of tyranny, of a level
 ‘ that overhangs its surface, and which is only prevented from
 ‘ rushing in upon it on every side, by those equal and just laws
 ‘ which constitute the dike of its defence. Such were once
 ‘ the laws of this country ; and they had defiance to inunda-
 ‘ tion. But I have proved, that the iniquitous statute of dis-
 ‘ franchisement and the no less iniquitous septennial act have
 ‘ left us only *one* part in *forty-nine* of that defence remain-
 ‘ ing ; and, consequently, that it is an abuse of words to call
 ‘ ourselves any longer a free people.

‘ ’Tis no answer to me to say, that we have not yet a
 ‘ bastille and lettres de cachet ; that we are not yet draughted
 ‘ by poll, and converted into machines and instruments of
 ‘ despotism ; that teeth money hath not yet been demanded
 ‘ of us ; that our courts of justice are not yet become courts
 ‘ of inquisition, nor relapsed into star-chambers ; that the
 ‘ three branches of the legislature are not yet become one in
 ‘ form, whatever they may be in effect. For all these favour-
 ‘ able circumstances will quickly and necessarily melt away, so
 ‘ long as there is no power left in the hands of the people for
 ‘ the defence of their liberty : tyrannical doctrines and prac-
 ‘ tices will rapidly and necessarily grow in the constitution,
 ‘ where their accursed seeds are already scattered, and the

‘ fat dunghills of corruption are even now forcing them into vegetation.’

Thus far this solid, perspicuous, energetic author, justly reputed one of the most rational and animated advocates of freedom since the days of Locke. A mighty oak, with almost its whole extent of branches blasted and leafless, the few barren shoots remaining overhung by some of their weakest fellow twigs, gilt and decorated with destructive ornaments, instead of the simple beauties of health and uncorrupted verdure, might be something like an image of our present state. There is hope of the tree, however, while life remains at the root. Now the root of freedom is immortal: and the revival of a nation to liberty is certain, when they have the spirit to examine into the abuses that enslave them, to see their rights, and to claim that restitution, which, whenever they agree in demanding, nothing can withhold from them.

I am, dear Sir,

Your obliged and obedient servant,

CAPEL LOFFT.

To Mr. THOMAS YATES,
Secretary to the Constitutional Society.

Resolved,

THAT the following Letter, received from Capel Lofft, Esq. the 20th of June last, containing Extracts from Grey's Debates, vol. x. be entered in the books of this Society, and published in the news-papers.

“ Dear SIR,

“ In reading the Gentleman's Magazine for March 1745, the arguments of Lord Chesterfield, and others, against the Law of Forfeitures, striking me, as very able and exceedingly well delivered, I rambled farther and looked into the Abstract of the Contents of Anchtel Grey's Debates; where seeing the head of Frequent Parliaments, I referred to the volume itself; from which I have extracted the underwritten.

GREY'S DEBATES, VOL. X.

Sat. Jan. 28, 1692.

On the first reading of a bill from the lords, for the frequent calling and meeting of parliaments.

Mr. Pelham. I am sorry to see gentlemen offended at a bill of so good a title and intent. The objections have been three—That it comes from the lords—That it will hazard the

the government—That it is unseasonable. As to the first, I take the lords to be concerned to do some such thing, because they rejected a bill from this house much to this purpose. As to the second, nothing of this kind can hazard the government, from the people of England. A present member of this house, a member also of the pensioner parliament, told me, that he, by order, paid pensions to thirty members of that house. The like, by long sitting, may be done again. As to the third, the bill can never be more seasonable than when we give so much money. Page 301.

Mr. Hutchinson. I think we, by negligence and late attendance, seem weary of our own sitting.

Mr. Herbert. I had rather have a standing army than a standing parliament. [He might have added, the alternative is but ideal: for wherever the last is, you may be sure of the other. Remark by the Extracter.]

Mr. Bowyer of Southwark. The two greatest mischiefs to this kingdom are, either to have no parliaments or to have long parliaments. The bill of rights would have 'frequent parliaments,' in the plural number. Such a bill would make men not spend money to be elected. P. 301—2.

Mr. Harley. Annual parliaments have been enacted by several statutes. It is no entrenching on the prerogative, but is for the honour of the king. A STANDING PARLIAMENT CAN NEVER BE A TRUE REPRESENTATIVE. Men are much altered after being some time here, and are not the same men as sent up. P. 302.

Sir Thomas Clarges. I should be unworthy to sit here, if I did not give testimony to this bill. The language of this bill is the same with the ancient former laws for annual parliaments.

Mr. Foley. It is necessary for us to have frequent parliaments, and to take care also that parliaments be not corrupted, which frequent and fresh are less subject to.

Sir Christopher Mulgrave. Since formerly laws made for this purpose have been evaded, it is fit now that such laws should be explained. I have ever found long parliaments ungrateful to the people. The reason to perpetuate ourselves is of no great benefit; but, on the other side, let your neighbours come in, and those we represent be at liberty to be served better. I think, long sitting of parliaments not for the King's interest. This parliament hath either had adjournments or short prorogations; by which means, by reason of privileges,

the people can not have their rights. By this we shall shew that we are not lovers of ourselves. [Meaning, more than of justice, the constitution, and our country. Remark by the Extracter.]

Col. Granville. I think this bill takes care of our antient constitution, and doth not innovate. When parliaments sit long, many will spend money to come in. I hope gentlemen will not be against looking their country in the face, when here discharged. P. 304.

Mr. Hopkins. Our ancestors always aimed at this, as appears by several antient laws. When men continue here long, they alter. They come up hither free men, but are here made bond men. If to be elected be an honour, let neighbours share; if a burden, so likewise.

On the second reading, Febr. 10. Frequent parliaments will be much better, and the ministry also will be thereby much better. P. 306.

Mr. Howe. The argument of prerogative and the advantage we shall give our enemies by this bill are words we make use of for our own sakes. It is said, it will weaken our alliances. It is unreasonable but we should have some good laws for ourselves, and not respect alliances in neglect of ourselves. [He might have added, Nor expect the faith of our treaties and the benefit of our alliance will be esteemed the higher by other states, in proportion as we resign ourselves to servility and corruption. Extracter.] Lord Coke says, Before the Conquest a parliament was held twice a year, and in Edward III's time once a year*; and this to redress grievances, which every day happen.

Mr. Brockman. I wonder this should be thought to intrench on the prerogative. *It is better for the King to rely on his people than on the ministry; not excepting the present ministry.*

Mr. Goodwin Wharton. I believe the bill not designed ill by the lords. I believe they thought not ill of this house; for only a good house will consent to such a bill.

Mr. Hungerford. The triennial act intended a new parliament every year†; not a triennial sitting.

Col. Titus. Manna when it fell was sweet as honey; but, if kept, bred worms.

* And oftener when need was. Extracter. † So in the printed copy.

Bill passed 200 to 161. [Rejected by a very invidious exertion of the negative claimed by the crown. Extracter.]

Mond. Dec. 18, 1693.

In a grand committee on an ingrossed bill from the lords, for the frequent calling and meeting of parliaments.

Sir Christopher Musgrave. I think we have a just right to annual parliaments.

Sir Christopher Musgrave, on the third reading.

There is nothing so much for our constitution as frequent parliaments.

Sir John Thompson. Every body is tender of the prerogative; and, I hope, we are too of our liberties.

Col. Titus. It is no objection, that this bill came from the lords. As for the disobligation to the people, good parliaments they desire, and I never saw long parliaments good ones. A picture, new drawn, may be like the person it represents; but in time the colours will fade, and it so alters from itself, that no man can know what it represents. If we would have a picture like, it must be new drawn. Page 372—3."

The above extracts furnish us with testimonies of the right, expedience, and necessity of frequent parliaments; from members themselves, speaking against their own obvious and most seducing interests. It also appears, that holding of parliaments was properly and constitutionally understood at that time, by several members at least, to mean sessionally elected parliaments. With the utmost esteem,

I am, dear SIR,

Your affectionate and most obliged friend,

CAPEL LOFFT.

To EDWARD BRIDGEN, Esq.

Treasurer of the Constitutional Society.

At a Meeting held at Holyland's Coffee-house in the Strand, on Friday, July 18, 1783.

Dr. J E B B (Vice-President) in the Chair.

Resolved,

THAT the following Address to the Merchants, Manufacturers, and other Inhabitants of Leeds, Wakefield, Halifax, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Rotherham, and other

other unrepresented Towns, be entered in the books of this Society, and published in the news-papers.

“ Friends and Countrymen,

Permit me, with the affection that every man ought to bear towards his fellow-citizens, and with the anxiety that every citizen ought to feel for his country, to submit to your consideration the following reasons, why, in my humble opinion, the reform of Parliament, now in agitation, ought not to be regarded by you with indifference:

1. Being subject to the legislation of persons whom *other men have placed over you*, it is evident that you are denied that which is the birth-right of every Englishman, and without which he is not a free man, viz. a share in the making of those laws which have power over your properties, your families, your lives, and liberties.

2. Being very deeply interested in trade, not only at home, but in all parts of the world, you ought to have in Parliament deputies well informed on the subject of commerce in all its branches, but more particularly acquainted with that which you in an especial manner commit to their guardianship, as your immediate representatives. It is not otherwise possible that your interests should be properly attended to.

3. Should you not join the public-spirited towns and counties who have petitioned for a reform in the national representation, there is reason to apprehend that it will be but very imperfectly amended. And if the amendment fall any thing short of making Parliament *independent* of the Crown, perhaps the only difference we may find, may be, that it may henceforth cost the nation more to purchase majorities for the Minister, than it has hitherto done; for, if corruption, instead of being made impossible, be only rendered *somewhat more troublesome*, the additional trouble as well as the additional value of votes must be paid for.

4. It is a truth known to you all, that a country which once loses its liberty, must shortly lose its trade also. Thus, on commercial principles themselves, you are bound to contribute your share towards the reform of Parliament, although it should be attended with some cost and labour. The fruits of your industry will prove to your children but a poor inheritance, if not accompanied with freedom.

5. So long as a *majority* of the House of Commons shall continue to be appointed by a number of borough electors
not

not exceeding *seven thousand*, as now is the case; so long will bribery govern borough elections, corruption be the characteristic of Parliament, and an oppressive taxation be the lot of the people.

6. If the present inequality of representation and length of Parliaments be the causes of parliamentary corruption, as they undoubtedly are, we must remove the causes before the effect will cease.

7. By a *corrupt* Parliament is meant, that which, instead of being a shield against unnecessary taxation, is the *hired instrument* whereby the nation is pillaged;—that which, instead of proving a check upon the Crown, when disposed to engage in unnecessary and ruinous wars, is the *bribed tool* by which the nation was first gulled into an approbation of war, and afterwards drained of its blood and treasures to carry it on:—and again, uniform experience teaches us, that whenever Parliaments are under an undue influence from the Crown, they are ever ready to betray the most sacred rights of the people. Suffice it at present to recal to your recollection a few instances only. In the reign of Henry VIII. Parliament enacted, that the King's proclamation should have the force of law; in the reign of William III. they made a precedent for suspending by statute the benefits of the *habeas corpus*; and it has since been several times practised: in the reign of George I. by means of the statute, vulgarly called *the riot act*, all the *constitutional* means of giving support to the civil magistrate were supplanted in favour of the practice of calling out the *standing army*. That government, which cannot preserve its authority without *such* an instrument, deserves not the name of government; and that country, in which it is an ordinary practice to support the execution of its laws by a standing army, is *not a free country*. But the deadliest wounds that freedom ever received from Parliament, were those which have been given it by *the disfranchising statute of Henry VI. the triennial act of William III. and the septennial act of George I.* for, by the joint operation of *these three statutes*, the very foundations of the constitution are removed. *Those* statutes not only defraud the nation of six parts in seven, both of its election and its representation, but they have effectually vitiated the remaining seventh.

8. Parliaments chosen as they now are, and continuing for seven years as they now do, will ever be composed, for the most part, of a few factions, under the guidance of particular noblemen,

noblemen, perpetually contending for the power and emoluments of office. The common-foldiery of these several factions, like that of all other standing armies, is made up of mercenaries from the most idle and profligate orders of the community. Who so idle, as men of pleasure and the vicious part of our nobility and gentry? Who so profligate, as murdering nabobs, prostitute lawyers, and unprincipled adventurers, who, through the iniquity of corrupt elections, make their way into Parliament, and there let out their tongues and their votes for hire?

9. Parliaments chosen as they ought to be, that is, by the whole nation in just proportion, and continuing, as they ought to do, for one session only, must of course (as corruption without doors would then be *impossible*) consist of men most eminent for virtue and wisdom from every part of the kingdom. Every district, and every town, (freed from an undue influence by the *multitude* of its electors) would undoubtedly appoint for its parliamentary representative or attorney the person best acquainted with its interests, and best qualified to promote them. These representatives, feeling that dependence on their employers which an annual election would insure, and carrying with them into Parliament characters of value, would be doubly guarded against falling into temptation; besides, their virtue would be farther secured, from this important consideration, that, as no Minister in his senses would esteem it practicable to bribe a *majority* of such a Parliament, it follows, that bribing *individuals* could be of no use to him.

10. But such a Parliament cannot be had, unless we will revert to the first principles of our constitution, which we have so shamefully abandoned. Since electing a Parliament is our only security against an arbitrary power in the Crown, *election* itself must be not only the common right, but the common *duty* of all the people.

11. The only plausible objection which is held forth, in order to discourage the *manufacturing* towns from demanding representation, namely, *the loss of time amongst the workmen that would be occasioned by elections*, is an idle bug-bear.

12. All the idleness and vice of modern elections in this country are the consequences of that very inequality of representation, and that long duration of Parliament, of which we complain. While all but the *villains* of former times, that is, while *all free subjects* had their votes, and Parliaments
were

were chosen sometimes twice and sometimes thrice in a year, tumult and debauchery at elections were unknown; and there were not above *two or three* cases of false returns or disputed elections in the course of *two hundred and seventeen years*, as stands proved by authentic records in the Tower. In a *single Parliament* of the present reign, the trials upon contested elections fill *five large volumes*; and the profligacy so frequently attending the choice of members is a reproach to our age and nation.—*Is it not time then to restore a representation of all and Parliaments of a single session; since they alone can insure us peaceable and virtuous elections.*

13. Prevent the temptation to the evil you dread, and the evil itself will be prevented: this is a law of nature. If parish officers, if common-councilmen of London, and mayors of corporations, if committees for all sorts of business, if, in short, deputies of any other description, can be annually or more frequently elected without any evil consequences, is it not an insult to our common sense to tell us, that deputies for transacting our parliamentary business may not be so elected also?—Prevent, I say, the *temptation* to the evil you dread, and the evil itself will be prevented. The temptation to the candidate—is the hopes of a place, a title, or what else he can get from the minister; the temptation to the borough elector—is the candidate's treat and his bribe.—*As elections of all, and sessional Parliaments*, would cut up by the roots this commerce of corruption, so they would insure you elections as peaceably and orderly, as your weekly meetings at Divine service, or in your markets. Thus, that glorious word, *election*, which is not to be found in the dictionary of any enslaved nation, would be restored amongst us to its plain and honest signification; carrying with it no other idea, than that of *a free choice of freemen, for their own benefit and happiness.*

14. But if we cannot believe history, nor place confidence in records themselves; let us, at least, trust our own senses, and observe what is the conduct of our sober and sagacious brethren of America. If representation be of no use to a trading people, and if elections are nuisances, why have the industrious citizens of Philadelphia, Boston, and all America, secured to themselves, by their new constitution, an *equal representation* and *annual elections*, as the very essence of that constitution which they inherit in common with ourselves,

and as that without which they knew they should not be a free people?

15. If you think to enjoy the benefits of representation through persons *chosen by other men*, and over whose dismissal you have no power, you much deceive yourselves. Supposing a merchant had not the choice of his own clerks, nor workmen, nor household servants, but they were to be appointed for him by the exciseman, or by some neighbouring Lord who had an interest in so doing; and if, when so appointed, he could not get rid of them in less than seven years, let their idleness, extravagance, and dishonesty be ever so glaring, and their insolence ever so insufferable, does it need the spirit of prophecy to foretel, that his name would soon be in the Gazette, proclaiming him a ruined and miserable man? And is not that great merchant, the Nation, brought to the verge of bankruptcy by these very means?—A nation happy above others in the fertility of its soil, and the industry of its inhabitants; a nation which now possesses a district of India equal to the whole kingdom of France, and until the other day, possessed also a continent in America, is nevertheless, I say, and by the means I have pointed out, nearly reduced to the condition of a bankrupt. In consequence of losing, through supineness, the appointment of its own clerks, workmen, and servants, or in other words, its own Parliament, it is now indebted *two hundred millions of money*, and not only its lands, but *its future industry*, is deeply mortgaged for payment of the interest; whereas, had it constantly asserted its rights, it needed not at this day to have owed a shilling.

16. As the interest upon these two hundred millions is just so much to be deducted from the profits of the national industry, and as nations less taxed may consequently under-sell us at foreign markets, the manufacturing towns of this kingdom are peculiarly and eminently interested in restoring purity to Parliament. They ought also to recollect, that if it be neglected, an increase of debt, and consequently an increase of taxes, must follow; for, so long as the *cause* of extravagance remains, the *effect* will not cease.

17. Although it is granted, that, if petty boroughs and septennial Parliaments were still to remain *in statu quo*, and the only alteration to be obtained, were a mere election of *two* members for each manufacturing town, the general advantage therefrom would be trifling, and the new elections might perhaps be inconvenient; yet, *that is not what is proposed*;

posed; nor would it be the consequence, if those towns, containing an immense proportion of the whole nation, would properly exert themselves. In conjunction with Surry, Middlesex, and the Metropolis, united in quintuple alliance, and the many other generous towns and counties which have already petitioned, the vast weight of the manufacturing towns would no longer suffer our hopes and fears, our recovery or our total ruin, to hang in doubtful balance; but the sterling gold of reformation would preponderate, and treachery and oppression kick the beam.

18. Take a sketch of such elections as are proposed. It being found that the proportion of English electors to every representative, according to the present number in the House of Commons, is about *three thousand*; it follows, that each county and each town ought to be divided into districts of election, containing each about that number of male inhabitants, of twenty-one years of age. By the militia lists alone this might be easily done. In towns, where the whole number of electors for each district might inhabit one parish, there ought to be ten or twelve subdivisions of them, so that not more than three hundred at most should elect in one place. This would not only preserve peace, but insure the completion of the election in one forenoon: it would also so facilitate the attendance, that no manufacturer or mechanic need lose an hour's labour.

19. A moment's reflection will convince any candid man, that in such elections annually repeated there could be no such thing as bribery; and if a ballot were added, all undue influence of wealth or authority would be effectually guarded against. Bribery and threats out of the question, who could have an interest or temptation to promote any licentiousness? It has already been shewn also, that in Parliaments so elected, and so dependent on the esteem and confidence, and power of the people, it would be as impossible to a minister to obtain support by corruption, as now it is impossible to find support *without* corruption.

20. But a minister, it is said, cannot carry on the business of the nation without a *majority*. This is held to be an axiom in politics. And so it is. No maxim is more true. But it is equally true, that, in Parliaments chosen as our's now are, that majority must be had by means of *faction and bribery*; in a reformed Parliament, it must be gained by *the rectitude of measures alone*.

21. A reformation of Parliament would produce a total revolution in the condition of the minister.—Instead of continuing to be an haughty lord and master of the nation, he would instantly become its servant, as the word *minister* imports.—Instead of having through a corrupt majority the purse of the whole nation at his mercy, he would find that it would not yield him an extravagant or an unnecessary shilling.—Instead of creating jobs, offices, and contracts, and squandering millions of the public treasure to gratify himself, his connections, his creatures and dependents, besides the enormous bribery within the walls of Parliament, he must correct every wasteful expenditure, and transfuse a spirit of œconomy thro' every department of the state.—Instead of being in a condition to make inroads on the liberties of the people, or to make any thing law, by which he could ingratiate himself with royalty, or strengthen his own hands against every opposition to his will, he must be content to act *within his own sphere*, which is to *execute* the laws made by the concentrated wisdom of the nation in Parliament assembled.

22. In such a Parliament as must be the consequence of asserting our right to an equal representation and annual elections, it would be as impracticable for any *faction* to displace an able and virtuous minister, as for a cabal of grooms and chambermaids, in a private family, to displace a steward, whose reputation had been established for talents and integrity, and who acquitted himself to the satisfaction of his master. So long as the minister did the business of the nation to the satisfaction of the nation, the representatives of that nation, having no temptation to do otherwise, but an evident interest in supporting him, would support him accordingly. Nevertheless, the House of Commons would still continue to be the political theatre for ambitious spirits to act their parts in; and it ought to be so. It is the proper school of politics; and whenever a great genius for government should arise, and could satisfy Parliament of any considerable incapacity in the minister, and of his own superior talents and knowledge, it would be the duty of Parliament to see that the nation was served by the fittest person in the kingdom; and a change would take place as naturally, and as peaceably, as when a private gentleman parts with one servant and takes another. Thus, so far from annual elections preventing amongst foreign courts a confidence in our government, as some maintain, they would raise its reputation for wisdom, vigour, and permanency

nency throughout the world ; and by preserving *a perpetual harmony between the crown and the people*, and keeping always at the helm the person best able to guide it, the King of England would once more become the most powerful and glorious monarch on earth.

23. The Duke of Richmond has nobly laboured in Parliament to procure such a representation, and such elections ; and he ought to be supported by all the honest and independent part of the nation. Demand then, with one voice, my friends and countrymen, that share in making your own laws, to which, by the constitution and the laws of nature, you are entitled. Pursue the only course which can ever affect any considerable reduction of debts and of taxes, or materially advance the interests of manufactures and commerce ! —In short, be Englishmen ! be free, prosperous, and happy ! And give your posterity the same cause to revere *your* memories, as you have to bless *those progenitors* who left you an inheritance in a free constitution !

THOMAS YATES, Secretary,

Resolved,

THAT the following Address to the Merchants, Manufacturers, and other Inhabitants of Leeds, Wakefield, Halifax, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Rotherham, and other unrepresented towns, be entered in the Books of this Society.

Friends and Countrymen,

Having shewn why, in my opinion, the reform of Parliament now in agitation ought not to be considered by you with indifference, give me leave to explain more particularly than fell within the design of my former letter, the nature and necessity of an equal representation.

1. The Commons, equally with the King and the Lords, have a right to share in making the laws of the land.

2. As a right to the *end* includes a right to the *means*, they may consequently exercise this right by *representatives*, chosen and authorized by them for that purpose ; for otherwise it were impossible that the right could be enjoyed or the end obtained.

3. As all the people (King and Lords excepted) are included

cluded under the appellation of *Commons*, so all the people have a common and equal right to representation.

3. That distinction which gives the privilege of election to the forty-shilling freeholder, and denies it to the copyholder of large property, or to the merchant of the greatest opulence who happens to have no freehold, is too preposterous to be dwelt on. Nor, when this odious distinction shall be abolished, can any other be admitted, without a violation of common right, and a degradation of some of the community below the rank of free-men.

4. According to the present division of the kingdom by counties, an equal representation of the *people* can only be had by a proportional representation of *counties*; that is, for each county to elect members in proportion to its population.

5. And it is also necessary to equality, that each county be subdivided into as many *districts* as it is entitled to members; so that each district may choose *one*. For otherwise an inhabitant of Rutland would have a share in electing only *two* members, while an inhabitant of Yorkshire would share in electing about *forty*.

6. Without electing by districts, there would be the same species of impracticability in assembling all the people of Yorkshire (about 120,000 males of 21 years of age) at the city of York, in order to elect their law-makers, as there would be in assembling all the people of England in the city of Westminster, in order to make laws. Our *right* therefore to elections by districts stands on the same ground as our right to make laws by representatives, viz. it is *the necessary means* to the enjoyment of an equal representation, which is our right. See § 2. And that those districts should contain no more people than are entitled to elect *one* member, is also evident; since it is a principle of common justice, that no man be put to any unnecessary inconvenience in the enjoyment of his right.

7. Without electing by districts, the very objects and ends of election would be always hazarded, and often lost; for if forty members collectively were to be chosen for Yorkshire in one election, scarcely any person in the middle or lower ranks of society could be acquainted with *the characters* of the far greater part of those who would be elected; nor would it afford any probability of providing a peculiar and intelligent guardianship of all *local interests* respectively. Besides these capital objections, it is obvious, that in forming and supporting

ing *lists of candidates*, the influence of sundry peers would be found to operate against the freedom of our elections.

8. A farther necessity for electing by districts arises from hence, that, in any case where more than one member is to be chosen, all those who succeed may obtain their seats in Parliament, although only *a minority* of the electors have voted for each, which is *contrary to the principles of representation*.

Let A. B. and C. be candidates where two of them are to be chosen, and the electors are 100 in number. Their respective partizans being anxious for success, and confident of strength, give none but single votes, when it appears that A. has 30; B. 33; and C. 37. Here both B. and C. become the members for this elective body, although neither of them have had in his favour a majority of votes.

Again: We will suppose the same candidates, and the same electors, and that none of them give single votes, when it appears that

52 vote for A. 26 of whom vote also for B. & 26 for C.	
30 vote for B. and the same	30 for C.
18 vote for C. and the same	18 for B.

Upon the whole therefore A. has 52, B. 30, & C. 18

26	26
18	30
—	—
74	74

Here then it turns out, that A. loses his election, although *a majority* of the electors have voted for him. If these contradictions and absurdities are incident to our present elections, what must be the monstrous confusion, if *forty* members for Yorkshire were to be elected by about *one hundred and twenty thousand electors* at one and the same election? Although *forty* only were to be chosen, we might have *sixty* or *seventy* candidates; and when you have calculated how many changes may be rung between such a number of candidates and such a number of electors, you may then form some idea of a *county* election, when the rights of equal representation shall be established.

9. But it may objected, that, even in a *district*, where *one* member only was to be elected, the most successful candidate, in case there should be *three* or more, might not have a majority of votes. It is true, but then it is to be observed,
first,

first, that within *such narrow limits*, it is not probable that more than *two* candidates should often present themselves; and when two only contend, one of them must have a majority: and, secondly, that if by a contest between *three* or more, such an equal division of votes should take place, that no one had a majority of the whole elective body in his favour, a second election might be had between *the two most favoured* candidates, to the exclusion of the others. Within the narrow limits of a *district* this remedy would be easy; whereas in a large *county*, where thirty or forty members were to be chosen, it might prove totally impracticable to obtain by any means a majority of suffrages in favour of every one, although the whole year were spent in nothing but elections. And, without a *majority* of an elective body have chosen a man, he can in no sense be called the *representative* of that body.

10. As a right to the *end* includes a right to the *means*, it is established by the foregoing reasoning; first, that our right to happiness and security gives us a right to representation; secondly, our right to representation gives us a right to equal representation; and, thirdly, that our right to both establishes a right to a division of the counties into the smallest districts of election that are possible.

11. On the same principle, that a right to the end includes a right to the means, we may go still farther, and shew, that as *parishes* are the smallest *public* communities, so the people, in strict justice, have a right to have their suffrages taken in their own parishes respectively, where there are public officers already existing who are fully competent to preside and officiate, and who might afterwards assemble in the center of the district to determine how the elections were decided. Thus, all would be upon a footing of *equality*, both in the enjoyment of the right, and in the *convenience* with which it were exercised.

12. As I take it to be very universally allowed, that the different conditions of mankind in point of property induces a necessary *dependence* of the far greater part of the people on their *employers* and *superiors*; and as I believe it will be acknowledged, that many superiors and employers are but too prone to make an ill use of power, I venture to maintain that the people have also a *right* to the use of a *ballot* in their elections; since, without it, they would be exposed to resentment

sentment and oppression for having exercised their 'privilege as free-men to the best of their judgment.

Let my fellow-citizens of the manufacturing parts of this county but duly reflect on the nature and necessary effects of such elections as would be the immediate consequence of a *full recovery of their rights*, and they will see that they must prove as friendly to peace, harmony, sobriety, and industry, in their several towns and villages, as to the commerce, prosperity, and power of our country.

How other bodies of industrious men, employed and interested like yourselves in *manufactures and trade*, have thought on the subject of reforming Parliament, may be collected from the several petitions of the *unrepresented* in Tiverton, Cambridge, Scarborough, Lancaster, and other places; but more especially from that of the *Tower Hamlets*, which is subjoined. As that petition approximates far more towards the true principles of a constitutional reform, than the earlier productions of the same kind, so I hope *the West Riding of Yorkshire* will still improve upon this model, and point more directly towards what is necessary to the great end in view.—What is it that we want?—OUR RIGHTS;—Away, then, with hints and timid insinuations! It is our business to define our rights, and to demand them.

THOMAS YATES, Sec.

At a Meeting held at Holyland's Coffee-house in the Strand on Friday, July 25th 1783.

Dr. BROCKLESBY in the Chair.

Resolved,

THAT the following Letter from the Dean of St. Asaph, relative to the prosecution lately commenced against him for the re-publication of a Dialogue between a Scholar and a Peasant, written by a Gentleman eminent for extensive learning and sound constitutional knowledge, and which was originally published by this Society, be printed in the Newspapers.

" SIR,

June 16, 1783.

" I desire you will inform the gentlemen of the Constitutional Society, that their goodness has put me into a situation that is not a little distressing to a liberal mind. They have made me painfully anxious to appear grateful for their generous and voluntary protection, and to render myself, if possible, not unworthy of it. It will not content me to stand acquitted of the charge, I will not say of the crime that I am accused of; for I know of none: I trust I shall appear upon enquiry to have taken no forward, or vain, or interested part in politics, which I acknowledge to be unsuitable to the character of a clergyman; but only to have taught and practised, when the occasion called upon me, the duties we owe to our country; those duties, which I have always held to be the most important and the most sacred duties even of a Christian. Let the weight of their obligation appear from the evils we have suffered, and still suffer by the neglect of them.

" I confess, that I, with the rest of the Flintshire Committee, approved of the Dialogue, not merely from the deference we paid to the authority of the Society, but from our firm persuasion, that it contained the clearest and most solid principles of government; those very principles by which our own free government has been hitherto preserved and sometimes reformed.

" For avowing these principles, though there are many who are equally criminal, and many who are more criminal than myself (and amongst the latter I have the honour to reckon all the members of the Constitutional Society) am I singled out for the object of a prosecution founded on an anonymous letter, supported by anonymous abuse and lying reports, and carried on under a false name, with the clandestine malignity of an informer, that feels ashamed of his own malice.

" I will meet the attack with the spirit of an honest, injured man, and am happy to find that the malevolence of one bad neighbour has procured me the countenance and good wishes of so many of the best of my countrymen: and even in the midst of persecution I have one great comfort left; that though malice and faction may oppress a private man, yet the British constitution is proof against the
" most

“ most formidable attacks : its own vigour, and the spirit and
 “ integrity it gives to those who love it, will always be able
 “ to defend the ground it stands upon.

“ I have the honour to be, S I R,

“ Your very obedient humble servant,

“ W. D. SHIPLEY.”

To Mr. THOMAS YATES,
 Secretary to the Constitutional Society.

*At a Meeting held at Holyland's Coffee-house in the Strand on
 Friday the 1st of August 1783.*

Dr. J E B B (Vice-President) in the Chair.

Resolved,

THAT the following Addresses to the Volunteers of the
 Province of Ulster, together with the Resolutions passed
 at a Meeting of Delegates from 45 Corps of the above Pro-
 vince, be entered in the books of this Society, and published
 in the News-papers.

THOMAS YATES, Sec.

At a Meeting of the Delegates of the Ulster regiment, at Hast-
 ings in Lisburn the 24th of June 1783, Col. Rowley in
 the Chair, the following Address was unanimously agreed
 to, and ordered to be printed :

To the Volunteers of the Province of Ulster.

Countrymen, Friends, and Fellow-soldiers,

While most of the nations in Europe are tamely submitting
 to whatever form of government one, or a few despots, think
 fit to continue or impose ; it is the pride and glory of this,
 that her sons have awakened from the slumber of ages, and
 asserted with success the birthright of MAN—the right of
 being governed only by laws of his own making. You, our
 friends, have been distinguished labourers in this great work ;
 you have reared a temple to liberty, whose base is on a rock
 which time cannot move ; your plan was that of a master, and
 the execution, hitherto, equal to the design : but permit us
 to remind you, that much is still wanting to its perfection.

The

The people of Ireland are now free from the control of a foreign legislature, but still there are defects in our constitution at home. If these are not redressed, all that has been done will only tend to aggrandize a few: the happiness of the people will not be increased; nor the burdens under which they laboured, lightened or removed. Among these defects, the present state of parliamentary representation loudly calls for the first notice. No man in *this* kingdom will be found hardy enough to affirm, that the constitution of that assembly is perfect, and stands in need of no alteration or amendment. To this reform we would now call your attention.—There is a wisdom in the nation able to save itself—Let the sentiments of the people be collected: when joined there will be an efficacy in them salutary and irresistible—As the first step to this desirable end, we take the liberty to invite you, our friends and fellow-labourers, to a conference and exchange of sentiments through your delegates. In the confidence of our past conduct we appeal to you and the world for the purity of our motives—we have a property in our country, and are enemies to commotions: we are acquainted with the blessings of equal government, and will never be the instruments of anarchy or confusion. From an attendance on such a meeting be not intimidated by threats nor cajoled by cunning. Remember the 15th of February 1782. Cherish a similar spirit of wisdom, moderation, and firmness, and like success will crown your efforts. One of the provinces has already led the way; let the others follow: let the PEOPLE be unanimous, and in IRELAND “the voice of the people must prevail.”

HERCULES ROWLEY, Chairman.

At a Meeting of Delegates from 45 Corps of the Province of Ulster, assembled at Lisburn, the 1st of July 1783, in pursuance of a public requisition of the Ulster regiment.

Lieut. Col. SHARMAN in the Chair.

Resolved unanimously,

That a general meeting of the Volunteer Delegates of the Province of Ulster, on the subject of a more equal Representation of the People in Parliament, is hereby earnestly intreated to be held at Dungannon on Monday the 8th day of September next,

Resolved

Resolved unanimously,

That the following Address be published in the Public Prints :

To the Volunteer Army of the Province of Ulster.

Fellow-citizens,

In common with every class of Irishmen, you are sensible that this kingdom for many centuries might have continued to bear its chains in ignoble and indigent obscurity, had not an army of its citizens, by a great effort, dared to cast them off.

That the dignified conduct of that army lately restored to the imperial crown of Ireland its original splendor, to nobility its antient privileges, and to the nation at large its inherent right as a sovereign independent state ;—that by inculcating the glorious spirit of toleration it has united the once distracted inhabitants of this country into an indissoluble mass, and promoted the most exalted reverence for the laws—are facts that will exhibit a splendid and interesting figure in the annals of the age.

From a military institution so singular in its nature as to comprehend the several gradations of nobles, commoners, merchants, yeomen, and mechanics, every substantial good will be expected by wise and virtuous men.

They will with honest pride behold in the state an unparalleled combination of the military with the civil character, existing only for the general interests of the community, and prepared on the purest principles of the Constitution to give efficacy to the wishes of three millions of people.

The idea of a well-digested Parliamentary reform has ever experienced a favourable reception in the uncorrupted breasts of Irishmen and Britons. It has been uniformly looked up to as the true source of public virtue and of political salvation, by the first characters these kingdoms have produced. In this age we have seen it warmly supported by that consummate statesman the Earl of Chatham ; and revived by the heir to his abilities and name the present William Pitt. It has received the sanction of the most eminent and honest men in both houses of the British Parliament ; of a great number of the most respectable shires in England ; of the Volunteer delegates of the province of Munster ; and within these few days of the unanimous vote of thirty-eight corps, reviewed at Belfast.

Among

Among the many glorious effects of which a more equal representation of the people in Parliament would be productive, the following are obvious:—The destruction of that party spirit, whose baneful influence has at all times been injurious to the public weal:—a revival of the native dignity of the Crown, by imparting to each branch of the legislature its distinct and proportionable weight;—and the abolition of that train of courtly mercenaries, who must ever continue to prey on the vitals of public virtue, till the balance of the Constitution being restored, the necessity for governing by regular systems of seduction shall no longer exist.

Then would the constituent body regain its constitutional control over its trustees—and venal majorities would not be found to support the most dishonorable and pernicious measures, in opposition to the sense of the unpolluted part of the legislature, as well as contrary to the universal wishes of the public, and to the true intent of the institution of Parliaments.

With due deference for the august body which we have presumed to address—we therefore beg leave to express our wishes that the Volunteer Delegates of Ulster would assemble with the same spirit of loyalty, patriotism, and firmness which actuated them on the memorable 15th of February 1782, to deliberate on the most constitutional means of procuring a **MORE EQUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE IN THE PARLIAMENT OF IRELAND**—as *the only measure* which can give permanency to the late renovation of our Constitution, or restore that virtue to the representative body, without which, though the mere forms of a free government may be preserved, its spirit must inevitably perish.

Signed by Order of the Meeting,

WM. SHARMAN, Chairman.

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